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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001444

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/27/2014
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION GREEN LIGHTS SIGNATURE
APPEALS PROCESS

REF: A. CARACAS 1346

[1](#)B. CARACAS 1267
[1](#)C. CARACAS 1247
[1](#)D. CARACAS 1376

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Venezuela's Coordinadora Democratica (CD) decided April 27 to participate in the appeals process, scheduled for May 27-31, for the signatures collected to petition for a recall referendum against President Hugo Chavez. CD leader Governor Enrique Mendoza told Poloff April 26 it is technically possible to win the appeals, adding that the decision to participate in the appeals process would be purely political. Beginning April 23, the National Electoral Council (CNE) gave the opposition the data categorizing the signatures as valid, under observation, or rejected. Similar data has also been given to the OAS Carter Center and the pro-Chavez Comando Ayacucho. After its analysis of the data and the CNE-proposed procedures, the NGO Sumate concluded that the key to opposition success will rest with its ability to mobilize the millions of Venezuelans who want to recall President Chavez. End summary.

Coordinadora Approves Reparos

[1](#)2. (C) The Coordinadora Democratica (CD) announced on April 27 it will participate in the May 27-31 signature appeals process for the presidential recall referendum. A CD spokesperson made the announcement late on April 27 after a seven-hour debate within the CD's political committee. Leonardo Carvajal, who chaired the political committee session, told poloff April 28 that about 10 of the 40 committee members at the outset of the meeting were opposed to going. The NGO Sumate, he said, gave an "excellent" presentation on the feasibility of the appeals process ("reparos") that convinced some, he said. Fence-sitters Primero Justicia and Alianza Bravo Pueblo resisted giving their support, but finally did so "under protest" for the sake of unity. Carvajal said that most groups saw that the appeals process, despite its risks, is the only way to hold a recall referendum against President Hugo Chavez by August.

Proyecto Venezuela and Causa R Hold Out

[1](#)3. (C) Henrique Salas Romer of Proyecto Venezuela (PV) sent a representative to the CD meeting, as has been his practice. Salas did not immediately comment, though Carvajal confirmed that Salas was taking a "calculated" position not to support the CD's efforts. Andres Velazquez of Causa R said his party would not participate either because the appeals process is designed to make the opposition lose. Velazquez said the GOV had devised a trap that would permit the GOV to allege that the presidential referendum had died of "natural causes, when we're in the presence of a murder."

CD Reveals Game Plan

[1](#)4. (C) CD head Enrique Mendoza launched the opposition's campaign for the appeals process on April 28. Mendoza said the CD would begin immediately to form committees to locate persons who must appeal their signatures. On May 8, Mendoza said the CD would re-activate 700 of the signature collection centers used during last year's signature drive to inform citizens of the status of their signatures. (The NGO Sumate planned and will help organize the event.) Mendoza said the CD would "swear-in" and train volunteers from May 10 to 17,

then put the volunteer networks to work May 18-26 to contact every signer that needs to participate in the appeals process. The volunteers will then mobilize the signers to get to the appeals centers May 27-31.

CNE Continues to Set the Rules

15. (C) The National Electoral Council (CNE) began releasing the data on the results of the signature verification process for the presidential recall referendum April 23. The database, which the CNE subsequently updated two more times, was provided to opposition representatives, the OAS Carter Center and the pro-Chavez Comando Ayacucho. The database listed 1,910,965 valid signatures and 1,192,914 signatures eligible for the appeals process. Some 900,000 of the signatures sent to the appeals process are associated with the so-called "planillas planas," signature forms filled out, in the same handwriting. The CNE rejected 375,241 signatures outright, principally for errors in the daily tally sheets ("actas"), unspecified errors in the fingerprints, and for contradictions with the electoral registry.

Technical Analysis of Results

16. (C) Maria Corina Machado of Sumate told the Ambassador on April 27 that the NGO's assessment of the CNE data indicated that the CNE had manipulated it, in demonstrable statistical aberrations, to require more appeals in areas where the pro-Chavez forces have the advantage. Machado said that under the best scenario, the opposition could go over the top with more than 2.6 million valid signatures. In the worst case, they would only be able to match the number 2.46 million threshold, but would have no cushion of signatures. It all depended on the politician ability to mobilize, she said. Fifty-five percent of the appeals are concentrated in about 400 of 2700 appeals centers, Machado said. Disruptions at these sites such as violence or inclement weather could cause serious setbacks, she warned. Machado indicated that Sumate had advised the CD on the appeals campaign, which will include a combination of media ads, websites, cell phone messages, political party contacts, and neighborhood canvassing.

17. (C) CD technocrats Amado Dounia and Alejandro Vivas also told poloff April 26 they believe the appeals process is winnable. The principal challenge, they said, is the physical limitation of having only 2,700 appeals centers operating for three days. This puts a cap, they estimate, of 800,000 people that can participate, not including those who wish to withdraw their signatures from the petition (see para 7). Dounia said they would push the first day to reach 370,000 appeals because the GOV will try to intimidate participants. Dounia estimates each appeal will take up to three minutes to process.

Chavez Eggs On Opposition

18. (C) President Chavez challenged Venezuelans publicly on April 27 to go to the appeals and confirm their signatures. He said persons in the opposition are against the appeals because an "immense quantity of the signatures" were fabricated. The pro-Chavez Comando Ayacucho threw its support behind the appeals process, though "under protest" because the CNE granted too many concessions to the opposition. MVR Deputy Willian Lara told reporters on April 25 Chavez supporters will be contacting those whose signatures were deemed valid by the CNE to convince them to retract their signatures during the appeals process. Lara claimed they would eliminate up to 15 percent of the valid signatures (286,000 signatures) in this manner because those persons had been coerced into signing. CD representatives estimate the Comando Ayacucho may strike up to 50,000 from

the valid signatures via this method. Sumate estimates between 100,000 and 150,000.

Comment

19. (C) The Coordinadora is back in its element: mobilizing people. Venezuelan political life will, for the next month at least, have the appeals to sustain it. To get there, the opposition had to sacrifice its principled stand that the GOV defrauded their signature drive through unfair rule changes. Those holding out for another solution have mostly accepted that this fight will not be settled by judges or uprisings, but by getting people out in massive numbers to demonstrate

the will for a presidential recall vote. The GOV underestimated the opposition during the signature drive and was forced to react blatantly to damper the opposition efforts. The GOV should be better prepared this round. We therefore cannot overstate the need for international observers as a hedge against such tactics, and to underscore our message that the international community is scrutinizing the referendum process.
SHAPIRO

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